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AN INTRODUCTION TO "THE FARCE OF THE WORTHY LAWYER PIERRE PATHELIN," TEACHER'S AID.

WALLA WALLA SCHOOL DISTRICT 140, WASH.

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THIS MANUAL IS PROVIDED FOR TEACHERS WHO ARE PREPARING THEIR CLASSES TO ATTEND THE PROFESSIONALLY-PRODUCED PLAY--"THE FARCE OF THE WORTHY LAWYER PIERRE PATHELIN"--AS PART OF A TITLE 3 PILOT PROJECT, "EXPERIENCES IN DRAMATIC ARTS," SERVING SCHOOLS IN WASHINGTON AND OREGON. PREPARED FOR CLASSROOM USE, THE MANUAL IS INTENDED TO INCREASE THE STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT OF THIS MEDIEVAL FRENCH COMEDY. IT INCLUDES--(1) MATERIAL ON THE PLAYWRIGHT, THE ACTOR, THE DESIGNER, AND THE DIRECTOR, (2) A SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY, AND (3) SUGGESTED RELATED PROJECTS FOR LANGUAGE ARTS, SOCIAL STUDIES, ART, SCIENCE, AND MUSIC. (MM)

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THE FARCE OF THE WORTHY LAWYER PIERRE PATHELIN

TEACHER'S AID

Prepared By

EXPERIENCES IN DRAMATIC ARTS

1968

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AN INTRODUCTION TO

THE FARCE OF THE WORTHY LAWYER PIERRE PATHELIN

presented by

Experiences in Dramatic Arts

1968

TO THE TEACHER

Your students will soon be seeing a live dramatic production by a company of professional actors. This production is part of a pilot project entitled "Experiences in Dramatic Arts" which serves six public school districts and three parochial schools in southeastern Washington and northeastern Oregon. EDA is funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-10) and administered by Walla Walla School District 140. Services offered by EDA include:

a) Professional productions of two plays
b) Half-hour classroom performances of material related to high school literature/social studies curriculum
c) Workshops for students and teachers
d) Consultant services for teachers

In order to prepare your students in advance of this production and to increase their understanding and enjoyment, this manual has been prepared for your classroom use. The material is intended only as a suggestion and should be altered, supplemented, and reinterpreted as you see fit. Gauge the length of your class discussions on class interest.

We hope that The Farce of the Worthy Lawyer Pierre Pathelin will provide an enjoyable and educational experience for you and your students.

I. Who makes a play "happen?"

A painter is solely responsible for his painting, a sculptor for his statue, a novelist for his novel. A composer writes a piece of music and musicians interpret what he has written on their instruments. But the theatre is a composite art, and the cooperative efforts of a number of people are required to make a play "happen." Because most of them work behind the scenes, we often forget about them. Many of your students could name the actors in their favorite television series but probably few of them are aware of the director or the man responsible for set decoration. Just as we enjoy a football game more if we know the job of each player, so we appreciate a dramatic performance more if we are aware of the people who supervise each element of its production.

A. The Playwright

Without good plays, the theatre would have no more importance than a circus act. A good playwright not only entertains us but tells us something about what it is to be a human being and in some small way makes our lives fuller. To illustrate how he does this, have your students imagine themselves in the cafeteria at lunch time. There are so many people in the room and so many other things to concentrate on that they might not notice what a boy at the next table is wearing, or even that he is there. But if a teacher had this boy stand on the table and do a tap dance, everyone would notice him. The playwright does with human experience what the teacher has done with the children in the cafeteria. Our lives are very busy, and there are many things that we don't stop to notice. But the playwright selects some part of life and arranges and heightens it so that we become more aware of it just as the students would become more aware of the boy on the table in the cafeteria. And the job of all the other people who work in the theatre is to help the

playwright do this as effectively as possible.

B. The Actor

The first tool of the actor is imagination. All of us have used this tool in the same way that the actor does. When a child plays at being a cowboy or a king, he imagines himself to be another person in the same way that the actor imagines himself to be a character in a play. But, whereas, the child has only himself to convince, the actor must convey his character to an audience who will then imagine along with him. Just as a musician has an instrument on which to play his music for the audience, so the actor has instruments to play his character for the audience. The actor's instruments are his voice and his body. To show your class how the voice and body are expressive of character, try the following demonstrations:

1. Repeat the same phrase to one of your students---"Jim, is that your pencil?"---first angrily, and then admiringly. Have the student interpret the difference in meaning between these two vocal expressions.

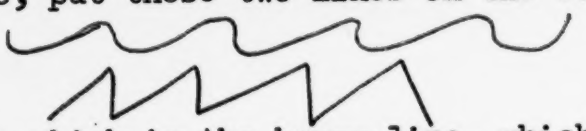
2. Walk across the room twice, first with head down, shoulders sagging, feet dragging slowly; then with head back, smiling, shoulders back, stepping briskly. Have students interpret the mood expressed by each walk.

Because an actor may be called upon to play anything from a Roman emperor to a modern businessman, he must have a broad education and be a careful observer of life and human nature. Ask one of your students to close his eyes and then describe another student in as much detail as possible. Because most of us are not very observant, there will be holes and perhaps even errors in his description. Have the student repeat this exercise, but this time give him 60 seconds to observe the student he will describe before closing his eyes. The second description will be more complete because of the careful observation. It is precisely this sort

of observation that the actor must constantly practice. "It is one of the necessary qualities of the actor to be able to seize and note at once anything that is capable of reproduction on the stage."

C. The Designer

All human activity takes place in an environment. Since the stage reflects human action, it too must have an environment, a setting. Creating the setting, is the designer's job. When the curtain is opened and we see the setting, it is as though we opened a book and read the "Once upon a time, there was...." It tells us something about the people who live in it and how they will behave in the same way that your schoolroom reflects the people who work in it and influences their behavior. The designer also creates costumes which reflect the people who wear them, as does real clothing. They may tell us about profession (military uniform, cowboy suit), economic state (rags, mink coat), rank (crowns, insignias), personality (conservative color, flamboyant style, neatness.) They help the actor to imagine his character more fully and the way in which the actor wears them in turn stimulates our imagination. The expressive instruments of the designer are line and color. To show your class how line is expressive, put these two lines on the board:



Ask them to decide which is the happy line, which the angry line. To show them how color is expressive, have them compare the images they associate with the color black and those they associate with yellow. Of course, the designer cannot put everything on the stage just as it would be in reality, nor would he want to. He must know how to use lumber and canvas and paint and wire to make us imagine.

D. The Director

Imagine the chaos that would result if we had an army without a leader,

a team without a coach and captain, a class without a teacher. The same chaos would result in the theatre if we did not have a director to coordinate the efforts of all the varied artists and technicians who work on a production. The director decides what the play should mean to the audience and helps the other artists to find how this meaning may be best expressed. He determines the pictures that we will see on the stage by creating the pattern of movement for the actors, or "blocking." He must be able to see what happens on the stage as the audience will see it, to know how it will affect them. Just as the playwright is the author of the play, the director is the author of the production and in the final analysis is responsible for its success or failure.

II. What happens in The Farce of the Worthy Lawyer Pierre Pathelin? Pierre Pathelin is an anonymous French comedy written in about 1470. At this time, there were no professional actors in Paris, and the play was probably presented by the talented amateur actors of a society of law clerks called the Basoche. They produced many plays satirizing the legal profession and probably took great delight in showing their audience how Master Pierre, the crafty lawyer, was tricked by a simple shepherd. There were no formal permanent theatres at this time so plays were done in any suitable open space: markets, squares, halls, and the like. Thus, there were no facilities for elaborate scene changes during a performance. In addition, the cycles of religious plays were very popular at this time, and the audience was accustomed to seeing a number of different settings, or mansions, one for each play in the cycle, assembled in the same playing area. So it was quite logical for the author of Pierre Pathelin to have three different settings on stage

for his play: Pathelin's house, the draper's stall, and the court. As with the cycle plays, the open area in front of these settings was unlocalized and could represent whatever was called for at a particular moment: a street, a market place, the area outside a house, etc.

Pronunciation of French names in the play:

Pierre Pathelin (pē - ĕr' pät-(ə)-la^{n}')

Guillemette (gē - yə - mĕt')

Guillaume Josseaume (gē - yōm' zhō - sōm')

The story of the play:

Pierre Pathelin is a sly lawyer, a "master at cheating," who is down on his luck. Goaded on by his outspoken and overbearing wife, Guillemette, he conceives an underhanded scheme to obtain enough cloth for some new clothes in spite of his penniless state. Off he goes to the market, to the stall of Guillaume Josseaume, the draper.

Master Guillaume is an egotistical penny-pincher, always intent on getting as much as he can while giving as little as possible. But Master Pierre, a shrewd judge of human nature, manages to get some cloth on credit by flattering the draper and promising him a fine dinner when he comes to collect his money.

Of course, Pierre has neither money nor dinner, but his plan has taken this into account. When the draper arrives to collect for the cloth, Pierre is in bed, pretending to be deathly ill and delirious, and Guillemette swears that he has been in this state for eleven weeks and could not possibly have been at the market that morning.

Master Josseaume is unhappy, confused, and not quite convinced by this turn of events, but he has more pressing business at hand. A shepherd whom he employs (at very low wages) has taken revenge by stealing some

sheep. Having discovered his loss, Master Josseaume is summoning the shepherd to court that afternoon. The shepherd, realizing that it will take a bit of trickery to prove him innocent when he is patently guilty, hires Master Pierre to defend him, and promises to pay him "as he deserves" if he wins the case.

As always, the crafty lawyer has a plan. The shepherd will pretend not to know Pierre, who will just "happen by" the court. In addition, the shepherd will answer nothing but "Baa" to any question asked him. Then Pierre, the innocent bystander, will suggest that the case be dismissed on the grounds that the shepherd is a half-wit.

When the draper sees Pierre in the court, he is so furious at the trick that has been played on him that he cannot concentrate on his case against the shepherd. His plea is such a garbling of cloth and sheep that the judge grows impatient and suspects his sanity. And when the shepherd "baas" and pretends to be a half-wit, the judge throws the case out of court, so that the draper is doubly punished for his selfishness by losing both cloth and sheep.

Of course, the lawyer cannot be let off scot-free either. When he goes to collect the gold he expects from the shepherd, that clever fellow will answer nothing but "Baa" and Master Pierre finds that he has in fact been paid as he deserves and been tricked by his own plot.

III. Suggested Related Projects

A. Language Arts

Students might present oral or written critical comments on the performance or write an account of the performance. Some might enjoy writing letters to the company (all letters received here at EDA will be gratefully

acknowledged.) Others might be interested in reporting on further exploration of theatre-related topics (a famous actor or playwright, how a play is staged, the theatre building, etc.) A tour of the Harper Joy Theatre at Whitman College may be arranged for your class by appointment. For those interested in creative dramatics, the story of Pierre Pathelin is simple, and children might recreate it in the classroom or play it with puppets.

B. Social Studies

Students might enjoy exploring the medieval society in which Pierre Pathelin lives. They might wish to discuss the concept of justice as it is presented in the play and contribute their own ideas.

C. Art

Art students might record their impressions of moments during the performance. Others might like to try their hand at designing a setting or costumes.

D. Science

Science classes might explore the technological elements of the modern theatre: the use of electrical and mechanical equipment, the problem of acoustics, the effect of colored light on painted scenery, the creation of sound and other special effects.

E. Music

Students might look into the use of music in the theatre, both in musical plays and as background. Others might compare medieval French music with this medieval French play.